



STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

On February 29th, 2020, a health official in Washington State announced the first death attributed to the Novel Corona Virus in the United States. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the Coronavirus outbreak a pandemic. The same day Mayor Rolison postponed his annual State of the City Address, which was scheduled to be held that evening at Changepoint Church. The following is the print version of the Mayor's remarks as drafted in late February and early March. While the Mayor plans to address the City at an appropriate time later this year, the original draft is being filed with the City Chamberlain.

March 11, 2020

Thank you Dr. Watson, it is a privilege each year to stand before our citizens, our residents, our local businesses, and all our city's stakeholders – from our non-profit and faith-based organizations, to our School District and our county, state and federal partners, and report on the State of our City.

I want to recognize our elected Common Council members who are here tonight, Chris Petsas of the First Ward, Evan Menist of the Second Ward, Lorraine Johnson of the Third Ward, Sarah Brannen of the Fourth Ward, Natasha Cherry is here from the Sixth Ward; Randall Johnson from the Seventh Ward, and I see Councilman Matt McNamara is here from the Eight Ward and our Council Chair, Sarah Salem – thank you all for everything you've done to contribute to the progress the City is making.

I'd also like to thank Pastor Marlow Dunham, Jacques Battel and Pastor Justin Sutka for hosting us again this year. Changepoint is particularly representative of our community because it is multi-denominational and multi-cultural. It reminds us that the mission of government is to work for all

our citizens, and that our success depends not only on the City's efforts alone, but on how we leverage our activities to maximize the efforts of our partners.

Since first taking the oath of office as your Mayor right here on this stage, in January of 2016, we have balanced the need to rebuild our local government with the need to reduce our deficit, lower the cost of our capital debt, and return to fiscal health.

Put simply, we could not solely focus on eliminating what was a \$13.2 Million Dollar deficit in the General Fund, we had to do that while we also addressed an aging infrastructure, restructured our department of public works, rebuilt our police department to full strength, and re-staffed critical vacant positions in Planning, Economic Development, and Engineering.

We had to attack wasteful spending, reduce crime, consolidate our transit system, replace the City's hundred-year-old reservoir and resolve collective bargaining issues.

Throughout these efforts, we also had to increase our emphasis on youth programs, our parks, our streets and our trees. We had to address blight and reduce the number of vacant and abandoned structures throughout our City, and we had to become more responsive to the every-day needs of our community.

This evening, I can report to you that we are making progress in all of these areas.

In just four years the City's general fund deficit has been reduced to approximately \$7 Million, or by more than *forty-seven percent* - and it's important to note that this trend has been consistent – we've achieved small surpluses in each of the last four years, while staying under the tax cap the last three.

We still have much work to do as we enter the second phase of our deficit reduction plan – and here is our aggressive goal... – *the City of Poughkeepsie will return to a positive fund balance by the time I end my second term as your Mayor at the end of 2023*

This remarkable improvement in the City's finances wouldn't have been possible without the work of our entire finance team, but I want to especially thank Bill Brady, our recently retired Commissioner of Finance – who agreed to return to city government in 2016 – for all his work. Thank you Bill.

Our goal of completely eliminating our deficit is being helped by aggressive moves to lower our debt-service costs. Reducing interest costs on capital debt is achieved mainly just by borrowing less, but we also know that continued delays in addressing infrastructure and other capital needs ends up increasing costs when we're forced to address things on an emergency basis.

Another way we've managed to reduce our costs of borrowing has been by taking advantage of market opportunities - and our own improving fiscal condition - to refinance some older bonds. In 2018, and again *just last week*, we've brought significant bond refunding opportunities to our Common Council for approval. These efforts have led to a sharp decrease in the costs of our debt this year.

In fact, overall debt service costs for the City's long term debt dropped by more than a Million Dollars this year, as compared to 2019.

Our upcoming bond-refunding transaction that the Common Council just approved also refinances some library district bonds, saving the library about \$44,000 a year in interest for a total of \$440,000 over the next decade.

I want to thank members of our Common Council for their contributions to all these efforts – could I ask all our council members to stand and be recognized.

The City has been the recipient of so much help from others over the years, it's exciting we're now in a position to help the Library. By the way, I recently appointed the Executive Director of the library, Tom Lawrence, to be our new City Historian, Thank you Tom.

Capital Plan & Infrastructure Projects

Each year the City prepares a five-year Capital Plan which prioritizes major projects and identifies funding sources for them – bridges, vehicles, building repairs, road work and upgrades to our water and sewer system are just a few examples.

Not that long ago, the City's Capital Plan was just a wish-list of items city leaders knew were needed, but over the last few years real progress has been made and a significant number of projects have come to completion, including our Creek Road Roundabout Project, replacement of our Sewer Plant's roof, the Centrifuge and Disinfectant Project at our Joint Water Plant, Roof repairs

at City Hall, a major renovation project at the Financial Plaza Parking Deck, and the completion of our new multi-million dollar reservoir up at College Hill.

Our current Capital Plan, which covers the years 2020-2024, identifies the source of funding for more than 60% of all identified projects. The City's renewed emphasis on strategic long-term planning will save taxpayers nearly a million dollars over the next five years, as major projects can now move forward on a timeline of our choosing, rather than being forced upon us.

Whether it be delaying the repaving of Market Street because we know Central Hudson plans on digging it up to replace their gas lines, or designing our renovation of the City's Liberty Street Parking Lot to include underground sewer line work that is grant funded, the City is once again able to take advantage of synergies, not only between our own projects, but with the projects of our partners.

Today, the stage is set for a number of important and exciting projects in the City.

More than three quarters of a million dollars in sidewalk and street repairs are planned this year.

We're now in the design phase for a \$1.2 Million dollar renovation of our Liberty Street parking lot – a green infrastructure grant program initiative, which will also provide us the opportunity to make additional progress on our 25 year Long Term Control Plan which was adopted and approved by the State back in 2012. That plan addresses the need to separate storm-water runoff from our sanitary sewer system, eliminate sewer overflows and reduce our waste-water treatment costs.

We also plan a Citizen Safety and Data Protection Initiative that includes safety improvements at City Hall and upgrades to the City's Information Technology Network. We have all witnessed too many cowardly acts of violence at municipal buildings around our country, and we've also seen a marked increase in data-theft and ransomware attacks on local government, and we take these threats seriously. I'd like to thank our Common Council for approving these initiatives, which are already underway.

We have two major bridge reconstruction projects beginning. The first is our Washington Street Bridge Project. The bridge was constructed back in 1925, and it was in need of significant work when this project was originally proposed back in 2013. I'm pleased to report that this project is eligible for state and federal funding of up to 95% of the project cost – which is estimated to be

around \$4.6 Million Dollars. The project will reconfigure the traffic pattern into a conventional “T”, making the intersection safer and more pedestrian friendly.

The Second is Garden Street Bridge Project. This is a steel beam and concrete deck type bridge that was built on foundations placed back in 1930. Here too, the problems leading to the proposal of this project were first identified back in 2013. Plans for the reconstruction of the Garden Street Bridge include a new deck, superstructure and new foundations. We are also replacing the six-inch water main that presently crosses the bridge and the sidewalks will also be completely replaced. The current estimated cost of this project is \$3.8 Million, and it too will be largely funded by State and Federal funds.

It puts things in perspective when you realize that one of the main reasons that these two important bridge projects did not move forward when originally proposed back in 2013, was simply that the City could not afford its part of the cost – often as little as 5% on major infrastructure projects like these. As we think about that, we gain a real understanding of how the things we’ve all done together these last few years, are having such a positive impact on the future of our City.

We also have several important projects in the planning phase, for which we will be seeking grant opportunities. Our plan to upgrade the City’s parking meters goes hand-in-hand with the \$2.2 Million Dollar renovation of the Financial Plaza Parking Deck which was completed in 2019, and the upcoming \$1.2 Million Dollar rebuild of our Liberty Street Parking Lot in the heart of our downtown. A new generation of parking meters will interface with customer’s smart phones, reduce our cost of maintenance and improve the experience of city residents and visitors.

Just today, our Parking Department took delivery of two new electric vehicles, and we are retiring two cars which are more than fifteen years old, and you will see them throughout the City, not just handling parking enforcement, but working city events, and helping to make our parking lots safer.

I want to take a moment to remember one of our long time city employees, Darlene Contreras who sadly passed away in January. Darlene was well known to many, as she worked in our lots and at City Hall for more than thirteen years. Darlene’s son Jason is here tonight. Jason, on behalf of all city employees and the City your mother served, thank you. She is really missed.

I briefly mentioned our upcoming Liberty Lot renovation, but let me just tell you how excited we are about this. Over the last several months the City has held two public outreach sessions to discuss design plans and gain a better awareness of the concerns of local businesses and other users.

These are just a few of the capital projects that are beginning this year here in the City or already underway that will have significant impacts on our community – and we’ve also begun the engineering work on a major pedestrian safety project in our downtown corridor, funded by a \$2.4 million state grant .

I should also mention that significant funding has also been awarded by Dutchess County’s Community Block Grant Program to projects in the City of Poughkeepsie, including \$300,000 for the Poughkeepsie Public Market at 33 Academy Street, \$200,000 for the affordable housing project that rehabilitates 21 Conklin Street, and \$150,000 towards the construction of 74 1, 2 and 3 bedroom affordable units at Crannell Square, just a block from Main Street, and I’d like to thank my good friend – our County Executive, Marcus Molinaro, for everything he and county government do for our City.

We have begun preliminary discussions with the County Executive about his re-imagining of Market Street, and how that might overlay perfectly with the City’s long-considered return of Market Street to a two-way corridor in our downtown. As it functions today, Market Street is essentially an extension of the East-West Arterial highway loop system. This one-way system can be intimidating for first-time or infrequent visitors to Poughkeepsie, often resulting in unnecessary circling around downtown in an attempt to find parking or locate a destination.

Making Market Street two-way helps make the downtown street network more logical and more easily navigable for motorists. Two-way streets are also generally understood to be better for local businesses that depend on pass-by traffic because signal timing forces drivers to stop more frequently than on one-way streets, giving greater exposure to businesses. In addition, the traffic-calming aspects of two-way streets make the area not only safer but generally more pleasant for pedestrians, bicyclists and other non-motorists, which can improve the viability of local businesses and increase the value of real estate. Communities that embrace the concept of calm streets and walkability are known to be more attractive to residents and commercial tenants alike, boosting the local economy.

We know, but it doesn't go without saying, that these projects would not have been possible just a couple of years ago, and there are others that I can't get to fully describe tonight, but please take a moment when you can and review our complete capital plan posted on our website at www.cityofpoughkeepsie.com – you can read about the \$4.5 Million dollar upgrades at our water plant for state-of-the-art U.V. water treatment (in partnership with the Town of Poughkeepsie), our conceptual planning for the repurposing of our decommissioned underground cistern at College Hill Park and much, much more.

Public Safety

Each year at this time, I report to you on our efforts to make our City safer, and the work being done by our dedicated public safety professionals to keep us safe, and to make Poughkeepsie the inviting and welcoming place we strive for.

In 2019 our public safety dispatchers responded to 15,601 phone calls to our 911 center. When you add calls to the police non-emergency number, the total jumps to 73,697. Our public safety dispatchers are the best in the State – let's give them a round of applause.

Our DPW team just recently completed a renovation project in our 911 center – and they did a wonderful job, our dispatch center hadn't had a face-lift in twenty years.

In addition, police responded and followed-up on 532 on-line reports of various activities and complaints as well.

Obviously our emergency calls represent a small fraction of the hundred-of-thousands of interactions with the public our officers have throughout the year – but we know that all it takes is one incident to undermine the trust and confidence a community has in its law enforcement. That's why, after a year of planning, training and crafting policies and procedures, we have now fully implemented our body-worn camera program.

This investment - about \$500,000 over the next few years - is an investment in transparency and in police community relations, and the return on that investment is immeasurable.

In fact, since I last reported to you here a year ago, our PD has not only fully implemented Body Cameras, but we have reinstated Community Policing in our downtown corridor, we've placed a School Resource Officer in our school district, and we've increased our BEAT patrols – our

Behavioral Evaluation and Assistance Team which partners with County mental health professionals in outreach to our homeless population and others in need, in fact – the City stepped-up our BEAT outreach in 2019, more than doubling the patrols leading to 432 interactions with individuals on the streets in the City of Poughkeepsie. We also launched a Procedural Justice Committee which brings together police and members of the community on a regular basis. Our Councilmembers Natasha Cherry of the 6th Ward, and Yvonne Flowers of the 5th Ward, are on this Committee and work tirelessly, not just in their own wards, but for the benefit of the entire City – thank you Natasha, and thank you Yvonne. Not only have we trained our police officers in Procedural Justice, but now we are providing this essential training to all our Department Heads and our Parking Enforcement and Safety team as well.

So - We committed to do these things... and we have.

I want to thank our Chief, Tom Pape, Captain Rich Wilson, and Captain Steve Minard, along with our partners, the PBA, for getting all this done. It has been an extraordinary year.

It's also been a very busy year for our Fire Department, which responded to 4,500 calls for service in 2019. 420 of those were calls relating to building incidents, and about 20 of those were actual structure fires – AND – our fire department's response time dropped from 2:26 to 2 minutes and 18 seconds – and in emergencies, seconds count.

And at this time I want to recognize the two firefighters in that video who performed the rescue on March 20, 2019, under difficult fire conditions – they are a credit to the City of Poughkeepsie Fire Department – Lt. Mark Myerson and firefighter Craig DeCiutiis.

The work of our firefighters isn't limited to responding to fires. 256 fire safety inspections were conducted last year, and the department continued its commitment to community engagement and education, participating in classes of more than 2,000 students and providing 120 hours of fire prevention training for our senior citizens.

This year, we will be adding a full-time position of Deputy Chief, specifically to manage the important functions of training and inspections. As our City continues to experience significant growth and new construction, it will be fire suppression and detection, training and community

engagement that will have the biggest impact – stopping fires before they get started, saving lives, and making the difficult jobs of our firefighters as safe as humanly possible.

In 2019 we saw three fire retirements in the Fire Department, but we've hired four firefighters - bringing the total strength of the department up to 62.

I'm also happy to report that upgrades and maintenance has been performed at all three fire houses, with our Clover Street Fire House receiving a new apparatus floor and new roofing materials. Hooker Avenue's Fire House received new gear lockers, upgraded heat lines and roof repairs, while HVAC repairs and upgrades were completed at our Main Street Firehouse & Public Safety Building {Thank Chief Johnson in this Section}.

While I'm talking about public safety, I want to take a minute to bring you up to date on our police retention and recruiting efforts. Working with the PBA, our finance team, and our Common Council, the Police Retention Program we implemented in 2018 slowed the departure of our officers in favor of other departments around the region. In 2019 the City received The New York Conference of Mayor's First Place Award for Local Government Efficiency for this Retention Program. Today, our police force is nearly at full-strength, at 91 officers. Having solved the retention program, we can now turn our attention to recruitment.

Tonight, I'm pleased to announce that the City of Poughkeepsie and Dutchess Community College have partnered to create a new "*pathway to policing program*". This program is designed to specifically address the most common barriers to hiring city residents.

The pathway begins in high school where students are invited to participate in the Careers in Law Enforcement Program offered by the City of Poughkeepsie Police Department which we have had for over 20 years.

Now, included in this program is a section with Dutchess Community College and their Criminal Justice program that will expose the students to the community college and their opportunities to become students there. Included in this conversation with community college representatives will be how to access financial aid for becoming a DCC student.

The Pathway to Policing Program implements the City's goal of hiring residents to become police officers, and it provides the City and DCC the opportunity to ensure students possess all of the requirements to be eligible to take the civil service test, including the 60 college credits needed to sit for the police officer exam. The program also provides training for the written exam, and support strategies needed to pass the physical fitness test.

I want to take this opportunity to thank Pamela Edington, President of DCC and Janay Gasparini, who is the Chair of the Criminal Justice Program (and also happens to be a former City of Poughkeepsie police officer) for all of their support and guidance in making the Pathway to Policing Program possible.

In addition to our partnership with DCC, our Human Resources Department will work closely with police on other recruitment efforts, and I'm excited to show you a new recruitment video done by our City of Poughkeepsie's Ashworth Creative. We intend to use this video throughout the region and the State to attract individuals and current police officers to come here to the Great City of Poughkeepsie to have an exciting career in policing.

Children’s Cabinet & Collaboration with School District



So we’ve made it a priority to strengthen all our partnerships and to work more collaboratively with all our stakeholders, and there’s no more an important partnership that the one we’re building with our School District.

About two years ago, we started the “Collaboration through Progress Initiative” with the Poughkeepsie City School District. Clearly, as the School District goes, so goes the City – and the reverse is equally true, and so our early efforts focused on team-building and better communication between the District and City Hall.

Now, with the arrival of Dr. Eric Rosser, we have taken this to a whole new level by creating a “Children’s Cabinet” – the only Children’s Cabinet in New York State outside of New York City.

We've also increased youth funding for the third straight year, and we'll be coordinating certain aspects of our upcoming parks project with the school district as well.

On these topics, let me first talk with you about the "Children's Cabinet". This ambitious cradle-to-career initiative got underway in earnest a few weeks ago with the formation of our Executive Committee. It includes the area college presidents. It includes school district officials, teachers, parents, non-profit partners, philanthropic and foundation members and community stakeholders – and there will be other voices along the way.

This ambitious and exciting undertaking would not have been possible just a year ago, because as you all know, the School District was undertaking a national search for a new Superintendent. The arrival of Dr. Eric Rosser could not have come at a better time, and his leadership and enthusiasm is really the driving force of this effort, and I've invited Dr. Rosser to say a few words this evening.

– Please welcome, our Superintendent of Schools – Dr. Eric Rosser.

{Remarks of Superintendent Rosser}

Thank you, Dr. Rosser. I must tell you that in the relatively short time I have known Dr. Rosser, he has become far more than a trusted colleague; Eric has become my friend. The Cabinet is being formed because we know that our children spend only about 20 percent of their time in the classroom, and eighty-percent outside. Their activities out of school are critically important.

Professor Paul Reville of Harvard University's Education Redesign Lab at the Graduate School of Education, said "We can't expect a 20 percent solution to solve 100 percent of the problem - we've got to address the inequalities of enrichment and stimulating activities outside of school."

In fact, studies have shown that by the time they reach sixth grade, middle-class kids have likely spent 6,000 more hours learning than kids born into poverty.

Think about that for a second.

Most of those hours are spent in after school and summer programs. We absolutely need to level the playing field because there are profound, harmful consequences to allowing these inequities to continue.

That's why we have significantly increased our commitment to our City's youth and their families.

Since 2018 the Youth Activities & Opportunities Grant Program has made available over \$500,000 in funds to over twenty different programs in the City and we will continue this funding because it is so important to the future of the City.

Economic Development

I've reported to you in each of the last four years that people are giving Poughkeepsie a second look. Residents seemed to be thinking differently, more positively about their city. Visitors and businesses seemed more confident. It was a feeling I had. It was the energy and excitement on the street. It was the activity inside of City Hall, the phone calls, the emails. But with four full years of data now I can definitively say that Poughkeepsie is on the rise.

The city continues to experience a high degree of development interest and investment. Since I took office in 2016, developers have completed 536 new housing units in the city, and there are more than 900 units either under construction now or in the approvals process, with at least a third of those new units being affordable. There is more than one million square feet of non-residential space that has either been completed, is currently under construction or is in the development pipeline. Building permit applications have increased 17% between 2017 and 2019. And we estimate more than one billion dollars of economic activity currently in the city.

Notable recently completed projects include Queen City Lofts, which was named Upstate Project of the Year for 2019 by the New York State Association for Affordable Housing. This mixed-use, mixed-income project is now fully leased, with 70 loft apartments and three commercial spaces including Fit Social, Zeus Brewing and the soon-to-open "Slate Point Meadery". Farther up Main Street, the former Ridley Lowell Cosmetology School is being redeveloped as we speak, bringing new housing and new businesses to downtown. And that's just the tip of the iceberg for changes coming to downtown.

The Poughkeepsie Public Market on Academy and Church Street is under construction now. The Lofts at Crannell Square, a new 75 unit apartment building on the corner of Catharine and Mill Streets is set to begin construction this summer

The new Revel 32 at 32 Cannon Street has become the City's newest entertainment venue, and now, with Bow Tie Cinemas, named a priority project by Empire State Development it will bring an additional new entertainment experience to downtown Poughkeepsie, adding to the wealth of our other cultural offerings. Downtown Poughkeepsie is definitely the place to be!

Recent real estate trends in Poughkeepsie also offer an encouraging sign that people are investing in our city. Our Anti-Blight Task Force, which we created in 2018, has consolidated internal and external resources to reduce the number of vacant buildings in the City. When we started that effort we were tracking more than 600 vacant properties, today that number is down to 304. Over the last year we've seen results from improved code enforcement and greater resources at our Department of Public Works. These efforts, along with the significant investment we are making in our own community, is making the City of Poughkeepsie a hot commodity these days.

Between 2016 and 2019, single family home sales increased 21% while the average sale price increased 27% during the same period. Multi-family home sales increased by 38%, with average sale prices increasing by 26%. We expect local property values to continue upward, making it imperative that we pay particular attention to ways in which we can assure that our historically marginalized neighborhoods share in the City's success and that the threat of gentrification is met head-on with policies based on social equity and inclusivity.

I want to thank our local Housing Coalition – Rebuilding Together Dutchess, Hudson River Housing and Habitat for Humanity, for all you do here in the City. We share your mission and we will do all we can to ensure that the growth we are experiencing leaves no one behind. That's why tonight I am happy to announce that the City is seeking proposals to revise its Comprehensive Plan.

Our current plan was adopted in 1998. Proposals are due back to the City by March 27th, and work will begin this summer. This work will be funded by a \$150,000 grant and funds allocated in this year's budget which were approved by our Common Council. Design and approval of a new Comp. plan is expected to involve more than a year's effort, with significant public engagement and

participation of all our stakeholders, and will be completed in 2022. This new Comprehensive Plan will help us avoid the pitfalls that often come with development, while at the same time assuring that the type of development we do want does not pass us by.

Let me take just a moment to mention the upcoming 2020 Census and how important it is to the City of Poughkeepsie.

The census asks questions that provide a snapshot of the nation. The Federal government undertakes this initiative every 10 years as required by the Constitution. Here's the key: Communities that are undercounted will be hurt financially. That's because the distribution of more than \$675 billion in federal funds, grants and support to states, counties, cities and other communities are based on census data. This involves more than 130 programs, from housing and highway funds, to nutrition and education needs.

Sections of the City of Poughkeepsie are considered "hard to count" areas – that is, people in those areas are less likely to fill out the form and be counted. This is one reason why it is imperative to spread the word and make sure everyone is counted! Your personal data is kept confidential, and you can even fill out the form online if you like or respond by phone or regular mail. We have more information about this on the City of Poughkeepsie's website.

The results of the 2020 census will have a profound impact on the City of Poughkeepsie, so I urge you to fill out the form when you receive an invitation by mail to do so later this month.

We all count – so let's be counted!

I'm struck each year at this time by the dedication of our City's 350+ employees. I hope that this evening I have succeeded in conveying some of the tremendous work that's going on not just throughout the City, but behind the scenes at City Hall. I know I speak for our City Administrator, Marc Nelson, and all our Department Heads, when I say that it is an absolute pleasure to work with all of you – and thank you for all you do for the City of Poughkeepsie.

Like so many of you, I've spent my life in Poughkeepsie. Through 26 years with the Town of Poughkeepsie police, to six terms on the Dutchess County Legislature representing Poughkeepsie

and also serving for six years as the Chairman of the Legislature I can tell you that serving as your Mayor is the highest honor in my career of public service. And none of this would have been possible without the support of my family. I want to thank my son Christopher for his support, and I want to thank my greatest partner in all of this, that is my wife Lori – thank you Lori for your strength and for your personal commitment to the City of Poughkeepsie.

Thank you all for coming this evening and for your support over these last four years. We've come a long way, but now we will push forward with an even stronger commitment to address the things that matter most to you – and as you've heard this evening, we will do more to embrace our partners and our shared vision of the Poughkeepsie we all want to see.

Thank you and God bless the Great City of Poughkeepsie.